

Financing the Upbringing and Education of a Bourgeois Family (1860–1890)

Abstract

This excerpt from a 1921 scholarly study documenting the family budget of a higher civil servant from 1860 to 1890 shows the costs involved in raising and educating children in a manner befitting the status of a bourgeois family. The educated bourgeoisie spared no expense in securing their sons' training for a profitable occupation, and the cost of raising and schooling German girls was hardly less expensive. Few upper-middle-class parents, however, were interested in providing their daughters with an education that would lead to professional independence. As the researcher notes near the end of the report, parents did not expect to recoup their investment in a daughter. Expectations were different, however, for a "productive" son once he was gainfully employed outside the home.

Source

O. was born in 1826; he completed his law studies in 1850 and got married in 1852; he held several positions as a judge and then in the upper civil service—since 1862 permanently in Berlin, initially as a member of a Land Central Authority. In 1878 he was appointed head of this body; in 1882 he became Real Privy Councilor with the title of Excellency. His annual income including housing benefits was 6,000 marks in 1863, 9,900 marks in 1873, and 22,500 marks in 1889; overall he earned 389,225 marks between 1863 and 1889, which amounts to an average of 14,416 marks per year. On top of this was added from 1863 to 1889 income from secondary offices, capital interest, bonus payments, etc., amounting to a total of 69,804 marks. From the source, which utilizes the account books of the civil servant's family to outline an accurate picture of the family's income, expenses, and way of life, the following items are printed here: a) the cost of law studies, including one-year military service and articles in the years 1870–1877 (first son), as well as b) the total expenses for upbringing and education of all three sons (two jurists, one forester) from 1859 to 1889, and finally, c) some information on the education of the daughters. Expenses for upbringing and education of the five children during these 31 years amounted to almost 50 percent of the family's entire expenses:

a) *The education of a jurist*: In September 1870 the oldest son, aged 17 at the time, passed his *Abitur*.^[1] The following items are listed among the accessories for the [graduation] ceremony: a hat for 2½ thalers, gloves for ½ thaler, and a bow tie for 10 groschen. Three and a half thalers were recorded for the exam fee. As it was the first time that one of the sons left the stern restrictions of school life to enter into academic freedom, the father did not deem it advisable to grant him complete independence at once. One semester in the parents' home was meant to serve as a transition. Matriculation in Berlin cost 6 thalers, 18 thalers were entered as tuition fees per semester, 4 thalers 20 groschen for ex-matriculation. In April 1871 the young student of law enrolled at Heidelberg University. His bank draft for the four months of the summer semester (mid-April to mid-August) amounted to 211 thalers, i.e., an average of 1 thaler 22 groschen per day; this had to cover living expenses (except for clothing) and study expenses. For the five months of the winter semester, his father transferred 235 thalers. During the semester break the son was allowed to go on a journey to Switzerland, for which 100 thalers were allocated. The father, however, considered a visit to the parental home unnecessary that year. The son spent the last three semesters of his university career at home again. Here he received a quarterly allowance of 50 thalers, which had to cover expenses for clothing and miscellaneous items but not tuition fees. In the fourth semester tuition fees amounted to 32 thalers 27 groschen, in the fifth semester 11 thalers 15 groschen, and no fees for the last semester were listed.

For the articulated clerks' exam in November 1873, 4 thalers were written down as fees. The son had to cover the subsequent stay in a small district court town with 45 thalers per month; after his return to the parental home he once again received a quarterly allowance of 50 thalers. In spring of 1876 he joined the Berlin Infantry Guard Regiment after having taken riding lessons at a cost of 30 thalers. The cost of the year in military service amounted to a total of 1,966 marks, of which 1,620 marks was devoted to maintenance outside of the parental home, 173.5 marks to the purchase of pieces of the uniform, the remainder to additional allowances for maneuvers and suchlike. After the year in service the son participated in the first military exercise right away, which required 330 marks; the officer's uniform purchased thereafter, including the sword knot, cost 342 marks. Subsequently, he returned to his parents' home once more, receiving the same pocket money as before. What can be added, looking beyond the year, is that in 1878 he first participated in a military exercise, listed at 218 marks, and then passed his doctoral exam in June. The printing of the dissertation and the exam fees together with gratuities cost his father 439 marks; apart from that he paid 260 marks for a merry doctoral feast, attended also by the examiners. In early May of 1879 the son also passed the examination for junior judge, for which 30 marks are entered in the books.

The entire education of a jurist, including all examinations and two military exercises took 7 years and 7 months; accordingly, not even a quarter of a year was wasted. The cost of the legal education without expenditures for military services added up to 7,220 marks; including the year of service and military exercises, it amounted to 10,076 marks. Factored into this are the amounts that the son received for clothing and small expenditures during his stay at the parental home, but none of the costs incurred by his presence in the household.

b) *The expenses for raising and educating the three sons were as follows:*

	1. Support until Abitur-exam	2. Allowance during professional training	3. Accommodation in the parental home during professional training	4. Sum of 1-3: overall costs from birth to completion of professional training
-	Marks	Marks	Marks	Marks
First son	13,713	10,076	9,877	33,666
Second son	18,580	16,762	2,784	38,126
Third son	26,277	11,786	10,746	48,809
-	-	-	-	Sum 135,691

The total of all expenses during the 31 years of reporting was 415,321 marks; accordingly, 31.8% of total expenses were required for the education and professional training of the three sons.

The level of the sons' standard of living during this entire period is illuminated by the detailed treatment of all expenses above. Initially accustomed to a simple lifestyle, during the last two thirds of the entire reported period they enjoyed the pleasures of a comfortable, in many ways even distinguished, bourgeois existence resembling that of patricians. However, their lives did not bear any touch of aristocracy or great capital whatsoever. As students they did not join any fraternities or any expensive cavalry regiments as one-year volunteers; they pursued no expensive sports, did not go on any great journeys. Their lives unfolded in a strictly delineated bourgeois sphere. Therefore, the table above allows for valid general conclusions about the cost of university studies. For the respective professions and time periods, the costs calculated above undoubtedly represent about the average expense a young man from a respected bourgeois family would require. However, in all of this the fact has to be considered

that due to extraordinary achievement the school days of the eldest son were shortened by one year compared to the norm, while the younger jurist took two years longer due to unfavorable circumstances.

c) *On the education of bourgeois daughters*: The school fees for the two daughters increased from a quarterly 45 marks per child in the lower grades to 54 marks in the upper grades. The father paid 300 marks a year for both daughters to take piano lessons. After completing school, the older daughter received singing lessons at 5 marks per hour. Overall, between 1867 and 1889 a total of 4,806 marks were spent on music lessons in this musical family, without any professional training in music taking place.

The daughters' future caused the most serious worries for the lord of the household, for as a good judge of human nature he knew that, given the lack of family assets, their prospects for a livelihood through marriage were not favorable. Most members of the bourgeoisie considered any professional training of girls as not befitting their social status; and more crucially, it was deprecated as emancipation. However, as steadfastly as O. otherwise adhered to tradition as the sacred heritage of the forefathers, he did not let himself be swayed when it came to the future of his children. He saw the choice of a profession as the only means to protect his daughters from severe poverty and emotional distress, and with the full brusqueness of his character he continuously confronted their carefree adolescence with these serious necessities. "You are not pretty, you have no money, so getting married is out of the question." He did not manage to force the exuberant temperament of the older daughter into the straitjacket of professional training, particularly because any vigorous action on the part of the father was barred out of consideration for the girl's severe, lengthy illness. The total cost of her upbringing in the 21½ years from her birth to the closing of the accounting books [1889] added up to 36,756 marks. By contrast, the education and professional training of the eldest son—albeit in an earlier time of lower prices—required only 33,666 marks. In the case of the son, that sum represented an investment, which eventually earned him the income of an upper civil servant; by comparison, in the daughter's case, the amount largely represented unproductive expenditures resulting from high living costs. These figures reveal the full tragic nature of the fate of jobless but sophisticated daughters of distinguished civil servants without assets.

The younger daughter entered a teachers' college in 1890 at the age of 17. It is suggestive of the degree of reasonableness with which female employment was viewed in these circles that, even in cases in which the economic situation appeared to absolutely require this step, it was criticized from many sides as bluestocking or at least as something not "ladylike." The accounting books do not report anything more on the cost of her training.

NOTES

[1] High school graduation exam—trans.

Source: Gertrud Hermes, "Ein preußischer Beamtenhaushalt 1859–1890," in *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft* 76 (1921): pp. 80–83, 280ff.; reprinted in Gerhard A. Ritter and Jürgen Kocka, eds., *Deutsche Sozialgeschichte 1870–1914. Dokumente und Skizzen*, 3rd ed. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1982, pp. 291–92.

Translation: Erwin Fink

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